

Language Development of Linguistically Diverse Children

Natalia Palacios & Amanda Kibler

***Diagnosis and Treatment of Developmental Disabilities in
Racially, Culturally, and Linguistically Diverse Communities***

October 20, 2011

Dual Language Learners?

- ◉ Children who acquire two or more languages simultaneously

Or

- ◉ Learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language
- ◉ Encompasses
 - Limited English Proficient (LEP)
 - Bilingual
 - English language learners (ELL)
 - English learners
 - Children who speak a language other than English (LOTE)

Types of early childhood bilingualism

- ◉ There is an uneven distribution of use of two languages, which will change over time
- ◉ Common types
 - One person – one language
 - Home language different from outside the home
 - Parents speak mixed language
 - Delayed introduction of second language

Dual Language Learners: A Few Overview Comments

- ◉ Worldwide, there are likely as many children growing up with two language as with one
- ◉ All children are capable of learning two languages in childhood
- ◉ Bilingual children's overall proficiency in each language reflects the amount and quality of time they spend in each
- ◉ The overwhelming effect of bilingualism in the home is positive

Challenges to Service in the US

- Significant influxes of new immigrant groups and changing migration patterns throughout the last decade
 - Make provision of services more difficult
 - Taxing for systems that already lack resources, staff, and cultural and linguistic knowhow
- Many immigrant families *do not access* services such as health care and Head Start
- Implications for
 - Outreach, staffing, organizational culture, family involvement, community partnerships, educational resources and materials, and a host of other issues

Early Literacy and Language Learning among DLLs?

- ◉ Much is **unknown** about typical language and early literacy development during the preschool years
 - Immigrant Paradox
 - What constitutes bilingualism?
 - Measurement and assessment?

Culture, Language, and Learning Integrally Linked

- Culture profoundly influence each child's development and relationship to the world (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE 2003)

- Ethnicity
- Racial identity
- Economic class
- Family structure
- Language
- Religion
- Political beliefs

Culture, Language, and Learning Integrally Linked



Myth of Learning English Only

- ◉ Immigrant parents often believe that it is better to
 - Abandon home language use
 - Promote English language use only
 - Goal of reducing confusion
- ◉ Yet, children learning two languages simultaneously display language milestones similar to those of monolingual children (Stchuk, Burns, & Yandian, 2006; Petit, et al, 2001)
- ◉ Strengthening the home language skills of children at an early age will facilitate the
 - Transition to kindergarten
 - English language acquisition

Bilingual language development: Common Misperceptions

- ◉ Learning two languages in childhood can result in in language disorders
- ◉ Bilingual children never master either language fully
- ◉ Code switching is a sign of confusion

Benefits of Learning Two or More Languages

- ◉ Children should be encouraged to retain/develop their home language *as they learn English*
 - Oral language skills in English **and** the home language are important precursors to literacy (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001)
 - Strong foundation in child's home language and pre-literacy skills is key to school success
 - Language and literacy development in the home supports language and literacy in English (Paez & Rinaldi, 2006)
 - Multilingual children are thought to have greater metacognitive abilities and mental flexibility

Benefits of a Strong Spanish Home Language Environment

- Reasons for Spanish-speaking parents in the US to speak to children in their native language:
 - A stronger Spanish language foundation better supports subsequent English language development
 - It exposes children to varied and rich ways of using language
 - It helps maintain cultural and familial ties

Cost of Losing the First Language

- ◉ Important for young children to have access to their home language while they are making sense of new experiences and concepts
 - Linguistic continuity facilitates access to prior knowledge and concepts (Sanchez, 2005)
 - Strong foundation in the home language can assist second language learning (California Dept. of Education, 2007)
 - Loss of home language may cause children's thinking and reasoning skill to suffer (Bialystok, 2001)
 - Parents with limited English language skills who speak English to their children may actually be inhibiting communication

Patterns and Stages of Bilingual Language Development

Children Can Learn Two Languages at Once

◉ Children require

- Supportive social environment
- Rich and regular exposure during early childhood
 - Opportunity to hear and practice language
 - Contexts that help build meaning and vocabulary

◉ Distinguish between simultaneous and sequential language acquisition

- Sequential learners have learned conceptual knowledge in their first language, which can be used for second language acquisition

Bilingual language development: Monolingual vs. bilingual

- ◉ Differences between monolingual and bilingual language development
 - Bilingual children may have a smaller vocabulary in each language than monolingual children in their one language. This is normal and temporary
 - Bilingual children may not know the social “cues” in each language if they haven’t yet been exposed to them

Bilingual language development: stages

- ◉ Infants can discriminate sounds in different languages and from different speakers
- ◉ In the first year, children exposed to 2 languages from birth tend to babble in their stronger language and demonstrate language-specific babbling for each language
- ◉ Before age 2, children exposed to 2 languages from birth know which language to speak to whom and in what situation
- ◉ Most bilingual children share the same milestones as monolingual children

How a Child Learns a Second Language

- ◉ Developmental sequence for second language acquisition
 - Continued home language use
 - Observational and listening period (nonverbal period)
 - Collect information about new language
 - Sound experimentation
 - May stop speaking but not communicating
 - Telegraphic and formulaic speech
 - Intentional use of new words and phrases in the new language
 - Productive language use

Code Switching

- ◉ The use of elements from two languages in the same utterance or same stretch of conversation (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004)
 - Helps in resolving ambiguities and clarify statements (McLaughlin, 1995)
 - Efficient use of linguistic and cognitive resources
 - Often do so by honoring the grammatical rules of both languages
 - NOT a signal of language deficiency or confusion

Implications for Instruction

- Curriculum for DLLs should make use of appropriate scaffolding strategies
 - Linguistically and culturally sensitive
 - Teaching strategies
 - Classroom and home-based activities and materials
 - Expectations
 - Facilitate language modeling in class and home
- Monitor for linguistic isolation
 - Effort should be made to include children in classroom activities, particularly as they are going through the observational and listening period
- Critically interpret assessment of language development and learning

Implications for Families and Language Environment at Home

- ◉ Assist families in making informed decisions about language goals
 - Culturally sensitive information about the value of speaking two languages
 - Account for cultural expectations
- ◉ Assist families in providing rich and meaningful language environment at home
 - Simply speaking the home language is not enough
 - Promote language expansion inside and outside the home (e.g., storytelling, reading, visiting library)

Resources

- Much of the information presented here can be found in
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Dual%20Language%20Learners/ecd>
 - <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Dual%20Language%20Learners>
 - <http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/earlychild.html>
 - http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleId=38
 - <http://nieer.org/docs/?DocID=165>
 - Baker, C. (2006). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.